

THE SMALL FARMERS

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there were 828 farmers on farms 10-15 acres and 486 on farms 5-10. Farmers living on farms under 5 acres are few (180). Those on farms up to 200 number 597 and above 200, 218. 241
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When the total population engaged in agriculture is considered rather than merely the farmers (owners), the greater numbers living upon small holdings become even more apparent. A full report based upon the 1926 census had not yet appeared, but a report was published upon the 1912 figures at the time the 1926 figures were released.¹² From that report it is at once apparent that the difference between large and small farms extends to the population engaged upon them and the type of labor employed. This new difference demonstrates a marked contrast, still apparent today, in the way in which large and small farmers carry on their economies. 241
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In 1926 the number of farmers and relatives assisting them in the Saorstat was 533,025 and those otherwise engaged in agriculture numbered only 139,104. The figures of the Report, based upon the 1912 census, show higher numbers, but the proportion of hired to family labor had not materially changed. From the tables of the Report, it is established that "only 26% were wage earners," that is, were not farmers and their relatives, working without periodic monetary recompense on an employee basis. Relating this to size of farms, it was discovered that not only were "5 times as many persons working on farms of 15 to 30 acres and 3½ times as many on farms of 30-50 acres as on farms of over 200 acres,"¹³ but that also "family labor accounted for 89% of the total on farms 1-15 acres but only 24% for farms of over 200 acres. . . . Taking all holdings into account, 74% of the persons working on farms consisted of farmers, their wives, sons, daughters, and other relatives," and only "15% were permanent wage earners and 11%

¹² *Agricultural Statistics, 1847-1926*, p. liv.

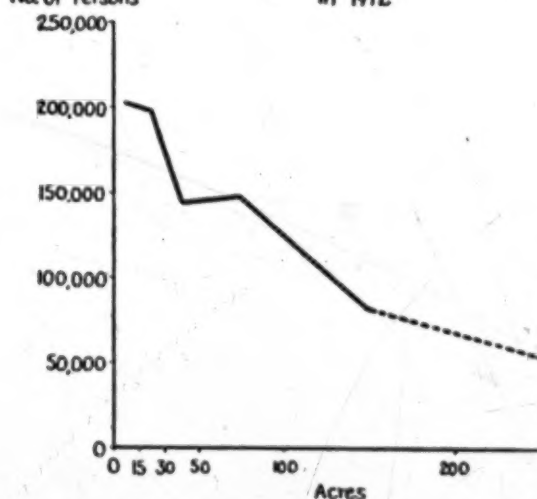
¹³ *Ibid.*, p. li.

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241 were temporary employees."¹⁴ In other words, the small
162 farm is generally worked by the family of the owner, while
464 the large farm, particularly the ranch, is worked by agri-
cultural laborers employed by the owner.

FIGURE 3

Number of Persons actively engaged in Agriculture
in 1912



These are the actual numbers arranged proportionately, in true descending scale, with the size of the holding. Figures for all Ireland. The figures are quite comparable with those of County Clare for 1932, where in records published in the local newspaper by the County Council Committee on Agriculture it was stated that on farms of 15-30 acres, the median-sized holding, on which the plurality of the farm population live, there were 10 acres to each person. But on farms of 200 acres and over, more than 35 acres were required for each person the farms supported.

In Figure 3 the tables are reduced to a graphic representation which shows well how much truth there is in the Irish assertion that "the smaller the farm, the larger the number of people it supports." One has only to look at it to understand much of Irish political currents.

¹⁴ *Agricultural Statistics, 1847-1926*, p. lii.

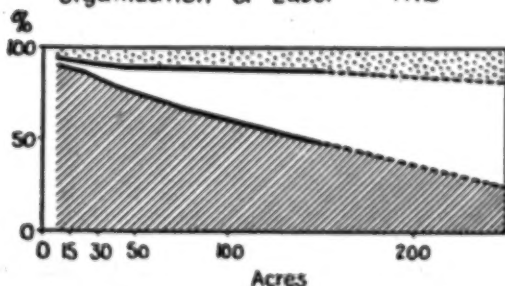
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In Clare the same situation is present. Most, if not nearly all, of the work of the small farmers is done by the family relatives. And for the whole county in 1926, 83.5% of all males engaged in agricultural pursuits were farmers or farmers' relatives (and 99 per cent of the rather small number of females). Only in the two districts which we have

FIGURE 4

Organization of Labor - 1912



- = Farmer and Relatives
- = Permanent Employees
- = Temporary Employees

The chart again shows a constant progression. The larger the farm, the less the dependence upon other members of the family and the more often hired hands are present. The chart begins on the left with a figure of 89 per cent of farmers of 1-15 acres depending upon family help and ends at the right with 24 per cent of farmers of over 200 acres depending upon such help.

already mentioned as regions of large holdings and ranches, Ballyvaughan and Ennis, did the percentage fall appreciably below that figure (to 73 per cent and 75 per cent).

Figure 4 presents this difference in organization of labor for all Ireland in 1912.

Small farmers and large farmers make a different disposal of their products. At the same time there is an exchange of products between the two groups.

These facts are to be got from the many statistics reflect-

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476 from time immemorial. Old people here remembered the
246 day when, there being no mowing machines, scythes alone
were used. Then the coöperating groups would have been
larger and a more pronounced rotation of the working
groups from meadow to meadow could have been observed.
The same custom occurs in other places; in fact, during
late July and August the entire small farm population of
Clare can be seen at work. Given the different techniques,
the same coöperation had taken place in Luogh and else-
where at the turf cutting, the oats harvest, and the potato
planting.

• [164] Yet there was no monetary wage or payment involved.
In the community of Luogh and surrounding townlands,
the only hired labor was to be seen in the meadows of the
large farmer (a cattleman with over three hundred acres),
[184] who had not coöperated with the small farmers and whose
entire way of life, as well as the agriculture he practiced,
was different from theirs. Except in so far as the agricul-
tural operation the small farmers were undertaking was
economic in itself, it was evident that an interpretation of
the incentives for this coöperation must include other
factors.

476 Driven to social rather than economic explanation, the
246 authors were able to ascertain that in each case of this
602 coöperation there was an extended family relationship in-
volved. Thus Carey, who had mowed the meadows of
Dennis and Seamus Molony and Brian McMahon, was sec-
ond cousin to them. Peter Barrett was first cousin and uncle
respectively of the two farmers whose meadows he had
mowed. The young men or boys who had worked Carey's
and Barrett's meadows with the latter's wives and children
were also relatives; they were sons of the relatives for whom
Carey and Barrett had mowed.

So it went over the townland. In no instance, of course,
had a man mowed for all his relatives; it was not necessary

OCCUPATION AND STATUS

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Another very great occupational change, though it does not show itself in any great numbers in census records, has been connected with the disappearance of the landlord from the western counties. A whole series of occupations clustering around the management of estates or the tastes of the local gentry and their families has gradually disappeared. Even the adoption of many of the conventions and habits, once exclusive marks of the Ascendancy, by other classes of the population has not served to stem the change.

If we fasten our attention directly upon determining what occupations are characteristically found represented in the countryside rather than in the towns in Ireland today, we get a picture of rural economy in which the followers of other occupations than farming are few indeed in the countryside. The occupations predominantly rural in Ireland are nearly exclusively those of farm ownership or farm labor. Only in recent years has there been any further development of rural pursuits to take the place of those going out with the changes brought about by modern communication and distribution of factory-made products. The chief of the new influences is not yet represented in full, even in the census of 1926. It is too recent a development. The introduction of creameries had not yet made its mark in that year. Plans for industrialization, since undertaken by the De Valera regime, had not yet even been drawn up.

To get a picture of rural life and the view of technological adaptation which it entails, we can look through the figures for a comparison of urban and rural industry in the years of the study.

Volume VI of the Irish census of population of 1926 entitled "Industrial Status" gives a view of the industries of the whole country and a preliminary view of the chief forms of industrial organization. Though the volume is largely concerned with unemployment, it also contains tables which classify those at work in the Free State accord-

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● 464 ing to occupation and employment. It distinguishes between employers (those employing persons for pay in their principal business) and employees (those working for others) and counts the latter by trade or industry or, if farmers' employees, by size of farm in acres. It further distinguishes those persons working on their own account and those assisting relatives. Persons employing domestics only are not classed as employers. Even in keeping these categories separate, the census ran into difficulties. The following statements indicate the troubles met in separating the smaller farmers from those who engaged in non-agricultural occupation and from hired farm labor.

Large numbers of small farmers and their sons work as agricultural laborers, road laborers, etc., as opportunity offers and many described their 'principal occupation' in the census (1926) as agricultural labor or road labor. (In gathering agricultural statistics in 1927, they were recorded, however, as farmers.) This is the chief reason why the numbers of farmers, male and female, shown in censuses of population were always so much less than the numbers of occupiers of agricultural holdings as compared with the agricultural statistics.⁴

The introduction to the volume then compares occupiers and farmers from figures of 1929 and 1926 respectively, and finding the occupiers much more numerous than the farmers, particularly in Leinster, the writers conclude:

It is evident that large numbers of small farmers in all parts of the country did not describe themselves as farmers in the census and that this was more common in Leinster than in Connacht, as more employment can be obtained on the large farms and elsewhere in Leinster than in Connacht.⁵

Thus the presence or absence of big farmers in a district seems to have an effect upon the occupational status of the small farmers, in affording them the chance of employment

⁴ *Census of Population, 1926*, vol. VI: Industrial Status, p. ix.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. x.

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away from their holdings but within their own area. In such cases the small farmers are both employees and employers employing their own families. 463 464

In regard to such difficulties the introduction makes the following final qualifications of its own categories of industrial status:

As regards the numbers returned as employers, persons working on their own account, persons assisting relatives and employees, it should be explained that persons employing domestic servants only were not classified as employers, that persons assisted in business only by relatives who had no contract for wages were classified as persons 'working on their own account', . . . persons working on their own account and persons assisting relatives were classed as employees (e.g., clergymen, nuns), and finally that many employers having small concerns (blacksmiths, dressmakers, etc.) described themselves not as employers as they should have done but as persons working on their own account.*

It is clear that, in segregating country occupations from those of the towns, industrial status as defined in the census is less significant than occupation itself.

For the whole country, taking in all industries, there were in 1926 as totals at work and out of work over twelve years of age some 850,000 men and some 341,082 women. Of these, those employing others numbered 62,605 men and 16,509 women, a fairly large proportion for employers. About 232,340 men and 62,949 women worked on their own account, and 196,034 men and 73,062 women were returned as assisting relatives. Employees of others numbered 402,631 men and 176,324 women. The figure for men, at least, indicates that those working for others were less in fact than those carrying on for themselves and families. The same fact is indicated for women, too, but only after the large figure of those engaged in "home duties" (a class which, according to the census, belongs in no indus- 464

* *Ibid.*, p. xii.

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464 try at all) is included. At the time, 1926, the census recorded 6.9 per cent of men and 3.4 per cent women as unemployed, figures to be added to make industrial totals. The percentages were very low, and by the advent of the De Valera regime in 1931 had increased considerably. However numerous they are, they do not change the industrial picture very much in Ireland. Small enterprises predominate, and very little of the great developments of the machine age is present. The supply and service industries are in a definite preponderance, and in that fact reflect the country's dependence upon its agriculture and agriculturalists.

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463 The Census of Occupations is quite different in purpose from that of industries and industrial status and proceeds by different counts. To quote the notes:

The difference between statistics of occupation and industries must be kept clearly in view. . . . A person's occupation is defined by the operations he performs in earning his living: grainmiller, jamboiler, tramdriver, packer, clerk. A person follows his occupation within a certain industry or service. Some occupations are peculiar to a single industry or service, . . . others are found in very many industries and services. . . .⁷

The Census of Occupations is obviously in many ways an elaboration of that of industries. The two overlap frequently. Yet they are distinct enough to give us an alternate view of Irish industrial activity of great detail. If now we examine this view for what it will tell us of the survival of rural industry, we see again that occupations other than those of farming are very few indeed in the country districts.

463 Table 5 records the occupations of the whole country
369 classed within industries. It lists followers of occupations living in rural districts in the left-hand column and followers of those living in urban districts in the right-hand column. Weighting the figures for all occupied persons properly between towns and country districts, we find that

⁷ *Census of Population, 1926, vol. II, p. 5.*

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are also characteristically rural still today. These are game-keepers, race-horse trainers, and jockeys. These are, of course, employees of the landed gentry who follow the cult of the horse. They are more often to be found now in the eastern midland counties than elsewhere today. 463 369

In County Clare rural occupations other than agricultural are equally rare. There the figures necessitate a slightly different definition of rural districts, since certain towns smaller than 1500 possessing local self-government are included in the town areas. But, by the same procedure as before, we can divide the proportions of total population into rural population in the county and then classify the occupations in Clare according to their rural or urban character.

In Clare, of course, there are no very large cities. The county counts 5,023 males and 5,522 females in town districts, and the overwhelming majority are country dwellers as one would expect in the agricultural west. The total rural districts in 1926 numbered 45,048 male inhabitants and 39,471 female. As befits a largely agricultural area such as the county, occupations and industries show a little different distribution. The population is for males 89 per cent rural and for females 88 per cent rural. Those gainfully occupied in rural districts number for males well over two-thirds of the total population, for females only one-fifth of the total, so that for men, at least, the numbers recorded as unoccupied are negligible. The low figure for occupied females is due to the inclusion of housewives among the unoccupied. The rural-urban ratio upon which we can build expectancies of proportions of followers of occupations to be found in towns or countryside is 92 per cent for males and 84 per cent for females. As for the whole country, female occupations are found only in the towns. 162 464 369

The table for Clare (Table 6) repeats practically exactly the same story as that for Ireland as a whole. In fact, the 463 369

present the one staple which he must buy off the 262
farm. This last he shares with the big farmer and 184
the townsman, but otherwise he buys little of the
meats and the shop products which fall to the lot
of townsman and big farmer.

Neither type of farmer has much use yet for 184
mechanized agriculture as we know it; for both are 241
cattlemen. Nevertheless, the small farmer differs 412
again in the tools he uses. He is the one who clings
to hand tools; in poorer districts he must rely upon
spade, flail, and scythe. The size of his farm and
the poor quality of his land confine him to the
manual tools. .

Lastly, big farmers and small farmers work their 184
lands quite differently. On the big farm, the farmer- 241
owner uses hired labour. On the small farm, the 464
owner relies upon the united efforts of his family.
The countryman's subsistence farming is a family
economy in which all members of the family take
part—sons, daughters and other relatives. He
differs completely in this regard from the large
farmer, who is an employer and whose hands are
wage earners.

This recitation of the distinguishing marks of 241
peasant economics serves a purpose. It reveals in 231
a roundabout manner what sort of livelihood it is 434
that the countryman wrests from his land. He
works a small farm with the help of his family. He
raises a small garden of potatoes and a few other
foodstuffs which feed both himself and his beasts,

II COUNTRYMEN AT WORK 65

light held. They worked with the aid of their sons²⁴⁶
and of boys from the families who had no machines.⁴⁷⁶
At each stage of the process a boy not a member of
the family gave his labour; he took his place at
meals during the day.

His own mowing done, the farmer paid his debt.
He took his machine to the farmer whose son had
helped him and mowed that man's meadow. In one
instance, a youngish farmer mowed the meadows
of three others. In another, a farmer mowed for two
others. Certain meadows in Luogh were full-
handed enough to do without extra hands; but in
five cases, though mowing and stacking took a very^[184]
long time and they were obviously short of hands,
no help was given. Two of these cases were bache-
lors, who lived alone; two more were 'strangers'.

Here was an important agricultural operation
undertaken by the small local community in which
provision was made for effective co-operation over
and above the usual family economy. It was no
isolated instance; it is immemorial practice in
Luogh. In fact, during late July and August the
entire small farm population of Clare can be seen
at work.

There was no monetary payment involved in this
work. In the country surrounding Luogh, the only^[464] ●
hired labour to be seen worked the meadows of a
large farmer, a cattleman with over 300 acres. He
did not co-operate; in fact, his whole life was cut
out of a different cloth.

BROWNE—*Ethnography of Inishbofin and Inishshark.* 343

Malformations are scarce, but as mentioned before (p. 323), arrest of growth of the pinna of the left ear was observed in one instance; and a boy with talipes equino-varus was seen near Westquarter; but his condition was said not to be congenital, but acquired as the result of an accident. 164 732

Hernia have been of pretty frequent occurrence of late years, Dr. Hart having seen six cases since 1888, before which date he had no record of having observed any cases of it. Of these six, four were of inguinal hernia, three on the right side, and one on the left, one was a left femoral, and one, in a female child, umbilical. The sudden occurrence of so many cases in succession would seem to indicate some cause of recent origin; what this may be it is difficult to see, but it is ascribed by some to the new style of work required for the building of the fish-curing station, piers, and other relief work, requiring the lifting of heavy weights. 164 [464] [483]

Fevers.—Measles and scarlet fever have not been seen for some time. Some years ago there was an outbreak of enteric fever in Middle-quarter, when a large proportion of the population of the hamlet were attacked by it, and there were several deaths.

"*Constitutional*" diseases.—Phthisis, though not common, is sometimes met with; and strumous affections, abscesses, &c., are not unfrequently seen, though not very numerous on the whole. The only wonder is that these affections are not more common, as the sanitary state of the houses is not by any means good; and it must be mainly due to their open-air life that they do not suffer more. Malignant disease is said to be unknown. Rheumatism, especially in the form of lumbago, is a very common complaint, but the acute form is rare. [364]

Dietetic Diseases.—These, with rheumatism and bronchitis, form the great majority of all the affections met with; the large extent to which fish and potatoes enter into their dietary may have something to do with this, but there can be no doubt that the use, or abuse, of tea must bear a certain amount of the blame. The most common forms of complaint are flatulence and constipation. As might be expected from the fact of fish forming a large part of the every-day food of the people, ento-parasites are among the most common of all troubles, about every tenth case applying for treatment being due to them. *Ascaris lumbricoides* is the worm most frequently found. 164 262

Respiratory Diseases.—Phthisis has been before alluded to; bronchitis and pneumonia are not uncommon in the winter months. 164

Local affections are but few, and those not very serious. *Eyes.*—Phlyctenular ophthalmia is not very common. *The teeth* are usually [142]

BROWNE—*Ethnography of Inishbofin and Inishshark.* 353

monotonous chant of three or four lines; the last phrase of each line was very often *go deo deo-deo* (= for aye, aye, aye), the vowel sound of *e* easily accommodating itself to the prolonged chant. Another termination was *nios-mó-mó-mó* (= no more, more, more). I still recollect one touching line of the dirge: it was—*tá mo theachin follamh go deo-deo-deo*, 'my little house is empty for evermore, more, more.' Unfortunately, I know nothing about music, but the chant reminded me of the fourth line of the old air of 'The Blackbird.' "

Owing to the stone of the island not being easily worked the grave-stones are usually rough, shapeless slabs, or are rudely chipped into the form of a cross, while the rest of the grave is covered with flat stones.

A large number of the men formerly went as harvesters to England and Scotland, where some of the young girls still go as servants; but very few do so now, though they say the harvesting paid well. It is more the fashion now to go to America even for a few years; and instances have occurred of people shutting up their houses, leaving all their furniture and utensils as they were, going off to the United States for three or four years, and then coming back, resuming possession, and falling into all the old ways and customs as if nothing very unusual had occurred. It is quite a common occurrence for young men to go to America for seven or eight years (generally to the neighbourhood of Pittsburg to work at the foundries there), at the end of that time to return home, settle down, and get married. Many of the girls go to Scotland, as servants, for five or six months of the year to assist their parents at home.

3. *Food.*—The dietary is much more varied than that of many of the inhabitants of the inland districts; it consists largely of fish of various kinds, potatoes, and home-made bread. Flesh meat is rarely tasted except at Christmas or some other great occasion, when a little mutton may be eaten, but fowl and geese are occasionally used. The fish which forms the staple of the diet is eaten fresh in spring and summer time, and large supplies of it are salted and dried in the sun for the winter's use; the kinds cured are mainly ling, sea-bream, and glassan.

Butter and cheese are not used; and eggs, though forming part of the regular food, are mostly employed as a purchasing medium for tea, sugar, tobacco, &c., at the principal shop, whence they are forwarded to Westport.

Tea has come greatly into use, and is taken in large quantities with

BROWNE—*Ethnography of the Mullet, Inishkea, & Portacloy*. 621

from plants growing in the district as formerly, but are imported. 286
There are several weavers in the district, and the clothes are made up by a local tailor. One unusual occupation, that of cloth miller or presser is carried on by a man in Belmullet, who uses a rather primitive press of his own construction.

There is very little regular employment for labourers, except 464 ● that given by a few of the resident gentry and some of the people of Belmullet. Labourers receive 1s. 6d. a day, or a 1s. and their 465 food; if at harvest time, threshing or employed at cutting turf, slightly more, about 2s. a day.

Little or no work is done by the majority of the men during the winter months, except to gather a little drift weed along the coast. 222

The women attend to the ordinary duties of the house, assist at 462 field work and at bringing home turf; they gather and dry carrageen moss (*sphacrococcus crispus*) which they sell at the rate of 2s. a stone (unbleached); they also card and spin the wool. Old women often get employment going from house to house oiling, carding, and spinning the wool for the household; for this work they receive 887 2s. a week and their keep.

2. *Family Life and Customs*.—The general characters of family life are much the same as those of the people of Inishbofin. 871

The children, who are usually numerous, are sent to school, if at all, at about five years of age; they show plenty of aptness at acquiring knowledge, but as their attendance is very irregular, through their being wanted at home to help their parents, their progress is much impeded. When they reach the age of fourteen or fifteen years they leave school and enter into the regular work of the household until they have attained means either to marry and settle down or to emigrate.

Some few of the girls, after leaving school, go out as domestic 357 servants either in local situations or to England or Scotland.

Both sexes usually marry young, the matches being arranged by the parents, and money rather than romance being the chief element 58 in the case, as a projected marriage is often abandoned owing to disputes between parents without the young people themselves being consulted in the matter. Love-making, except in the case of engaged couples, but seldom occurs, but that it does sometimes happen is 832 shown by the number and variety of love-charms and omens. As in most other parts of Ireland the majority of marriages occur before Shrove. When full agreements have been made by the parents, the young man goes and asks the girl personally. If he be refused, he does

[P.153, C]

551 and the names of her husband, e.g. 'Máire Ní Dhubhghain
[585] bean Shéamuis Mhic Ruadhraigh'—literally, 'Mary, daughter of Doohan, wife of James the son of Rory.' A number of circumstances will determine whether or not her husband's name will 'stick' as a surname or whether she will go on being known by her maiden name. These names in their full forms are only used on ceremonial occasions such as dances—when a man or woman is called upon to sing or step-dance—, or for prayers in church during a serious illness, or for calling the roll in school, or for putting on a tombstone.

551 The practical names are the rough English equivalents
191 of the Gaelic names, used in dealing with English-speakers
167 generally and particularly for use when working in England
● 464 and Scotland. The Government is usually dealt with in English for several reasons, mainly because although the islanders all speak Gaelic as their native tongue, the language they read and write is English—a situation brought about by the pattern of migrant labouring which forced literacy on them when working in Britain. Also they find 'Dublin' or 'civil service' Irish difficult to follow. Most islanders, then, have an 'English' name. Our examples would be 'Paddy Rogers' and 'Mary Doohan' to the outside world. Sometimes these names stick and are used amongst the islanders rather like nicknames. Usually the English version is a rough phonetic equivalent of the Gaelic—Ó Duibhir becomes Diver, Ó Dubhghain becomes Doogan or Duggan, Mac Fhlaitbheartaigh becomes Mac-Clafferty, etc. Sometimes this is abandoned and an English name taken for its 'likeness' to the Gaelic as with Mac-Ruadhraigh and Rogers—Roger being the English name most like 'Rory.' The name Fionuise is sometimes hopefully rendered Whorriskey, but mostly this is not even tried and the simple 'Waters' is substituted. Those going to England for work are particularly inclined to pick an 'English' name, i.e. one the foreman will recognize.

551 The third set of names, used for reference, consists of two or more Christian names, either Gaelic or English or both, 'strung' together in the manner described by Synge for Aran. Some people have as many as five or six names and 'epithets' strung together in this fashion. These names are the names of lineal ancestors either on the mother's or the father's side of the family. A person will take as many names as is necessary to distinguish him from all other persons, the surname system being inadequate for this task. (Four surnames cover 80 per cent. of the population.) He does not, however, pick these names arbitrarily but inherits the whole string. He can stop at any point in the string. Thus if a man was called 'Jimmy-Dhonnchadha-Mhuire-Mhici,' his father must have been 'Donnchadh-Mhuire-Mhici,' his paternal grandmother 'Máire-Mhici' or maybe 'Máire-Mhici-Tom.' Thus if our man wanted to add to his names, he would have to add 'Tom.' Usually one or at most two names are enough to distinguish a person, in

Coast guard personnel CONTEMPORARY SETTING · 17
first were assigned to Inis Beag shortly after the

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[44] lighthouse was built. Three guardsmen and their families lived in private dwellings in Terrace Village until the large station was erected after 1883 in Low Village, following which the contingent was enlarged to four men. The two-story structure contains four apartments, and these housed the families of the personnel until 1922. Now owned by the Irish Land Commission, two apartments are rented by islanders who sublet them to visitors; a third accommodates the nurse; and the other has been converted into a government sponsored knitting "factory" which employs local girls. One of the several outbuildings of the station contains the breeches buoy apparatus of the Coast Life Saving Service. The life saving company is composed of 15 Inis Beag men, hired and supervised by a branch of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, and was responsible for the rescue of the freighter's crew in 1960—its only rescue operation since being formed almost 60 years ago. A boathouse was erected on the strand by the coast guard company, and now it serves as an all-purpose building: dance hall, trade school, storage house, and meeting place.

743 Health services are provided the folk by a nurse, a doctor who lives in a neighboring island, and medical and dental personnel from the mainland who visit the island occasionally for specific examination and treatment purposes. A much renowned mainland woman who lived in Inis Beag intermittently between 1903 and 1923 (and wrote a book about her experiences) was the first nurse to serve the islanders; but since 1932, the Lady Dudley Nursing Scheme of Dublin has maintained "Jubilee Nurses" in Inis Beag continuously, each one serving from one to five years. The nurse is responsible to the doctor, from whom she obtains medicines furnished by the county council, and handles most of the medical cases which arise. Bedridden patients and women who are secretive about their ailments are visited by her during two daily rounds, while after dark she is visited by other patients, mostly men, who are also secretive about their infirmities, and she may be called out on emergencies. The doctor comes to Inis Beag once a month and visits the seriously ill accompanied by the nurse, and in the case of emergencies at other times which cannot be taken care of by her, he is brought over in the lifeboat of the Coast Life Saving Service at her summons.

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206 The post office in High Village is an adjunct to the house of its supervisor, just as the shops are to the homes of their proprietors. The office is a small room with a counter, separating the clerk and her desk and switchboard from those who do business there, and a telephone booth. A radio telephone serves the island and can be used between nine o'clock in the morning and six at night. A line runs to the house of "Number One" of the life saving company, which he alone can use in matters pertaining to the service during the prescribed hours. When the [203] freighter ran aground before dawn, it was discovered by islanders who informed the company; Radio Eireann reported the plight of the vessel, on the basis of S.O.S. messages, in the seven o'clock news, but the company had reached the reef before the telephone was available.

346 Inis Beag has only a small church, known as the "chapel." After the church of the patron saint was abandoned, a house served as the place of worship for a time, then was superseded by the old chapel whose foundations can be discerned

2

The Land and the Sea

Standard of Living

THE STANDARD OF LIVING of the folk has improved vastly since the establishment of the Irish Land Commission in 1881 and the Congested Districts Board ten years later, and the islanders are better off today than the inhabitants of some other areas of the Gaeltacht. In 1891, the Congested Districts were delineated as regions in which the population did not possess sufficient land to maintain life except at an extremely low standard. Between that year and 1951, the population in the districts declined 42 percent—from 541,000 to 367,000 persons. The few areas which would rank as congested now, on the 1891 basis, are mainly in Cos. Donegal, Mayo, and Galway (Freeman 1960:121-123). A vigorous and continuing effort to stem the tide of emigration, in part caused by poverty, led the commission, the board, subsequently the Gaeltacht Eireann which replaced the board after 1925, and other government agencies appointed in this century, to improve the standard of living by various actions: the enlargement of land holdings for more effective farming, the encouragement of small factory and domestic industries, the improvement of fishing, the construction of public works, and the introduction of various subsidies. Seasonal laboring in England, often practiced out of necessity by mainland farmers but not by the islanders, and remittances from relatives who have emigrated are income sources which also have served to alleviate poverty; but the major palliative throughout Ireland has been emigration. One of the factors limiting migration from Inis Beag to the mainland until recent decades was the low standard of living which prevailed in the country at large. An islander could not escape local hardships and privations by emigrating to urban centers as he can today; he had to turn his back on Ireland.

Most Inis Beag people believe themselves to be materially poor, although they resent others agreeing publicly with this view. A well-known Dublin newspaper feature writer in 1963 was denounced, and a vow made not to permit him to

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[137] which contain a large portion of the natural flora—herbs and shrubs—
[361] of the island. Stone fences delimit many hundreds of plots which com-
[417] pose most of the two-square-mile land surface of Inis Beag.

105 The island boasts a post office with radio-telephone facilities, a
[205] "national school" in which three teachers instruct ninety pupils in the
[206] seven "standards," two provision shops with attached "pubs," a former
[871] coast guard station now housing the nurse and a knitting industry which
[759] employs local girls, a lighthouse, and a chapel served by a curate who
[288] resides nearby. Inis Beag lacks electricity and running water, and the
[464] only vehicles are several ass-drawn carts which are able to travel the
[502] narrow, fence-bordered trails. A small "steamer" carrying supplies,
[793] passengers, and mail to and from a mainland port visits the island
at least once each week. That Inis Beag has experienced far less
cultural change than other island communities of Ireland is largely due
to the fact that, in absence of a deep water quay, the steamer has
had to stand off the strand and be met by "canoes." Most of the
tourists who come to the island stay only for the hours that the steamer
is anchored and go ashore mainly for the thrill of riding in the canoes,
which the island men row with consummate skill. Insofar as I can dis-
cover, the inhabitants of Inis Beag are less prone to visit the mainland
than are the peoples of other Irish islands.

INIS BEAG HISTORY AND CULTURE²

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[211] The prehistory and history of Inis Beag are recorded dramatically in
a multitude of monuments and artifacts of stone and metal, including
Neolithic axe-heads and kitchen middens, Copper-Bronze Age gallery
grave tombs and burial mounds of earth and stone, an Iron Age prom-
ontory fort, and medieval Christian monasteries, churches, cemeteries,
stone houses, and a sacred well, as well as a three-story tower house
built by the political overlords of the island. Irish nationalists claim that
the contemporary folk are lineal descendants of ancient, once civilized

[101] ² The culture described herein is that of 1959-1960 and excludes important
[121] changes which have occurred since then, such as those resulting from the intro-
duction of television, a summer language school for pupils from the mainland,
and free secondary education.